

## Short communications

### Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* breeding on Zanzibar

While visiting Chumbe Island, south of Zanzibar town from 19 to 21 July 1994, I noticed terns visiting the two small islets about 200 m off the southwest of the main island. The birds were Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* and appeared to be breeding.

The islets are about 5 m high and are joined to Chumbe at low tide. They consist of coral rag, one almost devoid of vegetation, the more northerly one having some scrub and herbaceous plant growth. Each is about 20 x 7 m with a reasonable overhang caused by wave action. I visited the the furthest islet with six students at high tide but found the boat movement and dangerous coral rag too difficult. On the next day at 09:00 we walked to the islets and were able to climb a ladder to within a metre of the top. The top of the islet had weathered into sharp ridges of coral rag. The terns' nests were in crevices between the ridges; some had sparse nesting material (grass) while others had no material at all. Most nests contained one egg and about three in 20 had two. Most were dirty and often bleached indicating that they were 'hard sat'. Although we had no measuring instruments we considered that there were an average of seven nests per square metre. Allowing for some dead brushwood at the north end which was not used by the terns, and sparser areas along the edge, we estimated between 500 and 700 nests. The number of birds flying around supported this estimate.

No other species of tern or other bird was present but the colony was visited two or three times a day by six Indian House Crows *Corvus splendens* and once or twice a day by a single Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*. These visitors caused consternation amongst the terns although we found little evidence of destroyed eggs and very few nests were empty. One adult tern was found newly dead with its head caught between branches of the dead brushwood. The other islet with more vegetation (which was not visited) had a smaller number of breeding pairs, perhaps less than 50.

Pakenham (1979) noted that the Roseate Tern "Irregularly visits the islands to breed." and mentioned that Vaughan recorded breeding—but gave no numbers—on isolated rocks off the west coasts of Zanzibar and Pemba in July and August. This was probably in the 1930s. In East Africa as a whole, the Roseate Tern is the most numerous and widespread breeding larid, between June and August (Britton & Brown 1974). However, as far as I know, these are the first breeding records for Zanzibar since those of Vaughan.

### References

- BRITTON, P.L. & BROWN, L.H. 1974. The status and breeding behaviour of East African Lari. *Ostrich* 45: 63–82.
- PAKENHAM, R.H.W. 1979. *The birds of Zanzibar and Pemba*. London: BOU.

*Dudley Iles, Box 1199, Zanzibar*